

THE TOWER OF FIVE GLORIES

857 ball game of China. It has several advantages for the
524 Chinese, for it can be played on a small piece of ground,
which is often all that is available, and it does not require
the special boots needed for football, which few Chinese
schoolboys could afford. In most parts of China the ground
is hard and dry for a large part of the year, and any game
such as Rugby Football, or Association, in which the
players are likely to fall, or be barged down, is dangerous
unless played on a specially softened and prepared ground,
and that of course is rarely available. Basket ball, introduced
by the schools and also played by soldiers in barracks, is
thus the only foreign game known to the Min Chia.

857 When a boy or girl is seven years old schooling begins.

872 Before that, in well-to-do families, the child will have
already been taught the elements of writing and have begun
to learn to read. During the school years most children
live at home, only those who attend the Middle Schools
and come from distant villages, boarding at the school.
Although elementary education is widespread, only a small
proportion of boys, and still fewer girls go on to the

883 Middle School. At thirteen or fourteen school ends for

874 most boys, and they either begin to do full time work on
the land, or are apprenticed to a tradesman. The apprentice
system is only followed in the city, for in the villages
there is no trade but agriculture or lake fishing. The
apprentice may be engaged at any age over fourteen years,
and is bound to serve his master for four years. In return he
must be taught the craft, fed, lodged in the shop, and given
a new suit of coat and trousers every New Year's day. He
receives no pay during these years, but he shares in the
family festivities, and on the occasion of the festival of the
God of Wealth, locally known as the Golden Armoured
God (Chin Chia Ts'ai Shen), when the merchants picnic
near the God's temple outside the west gate, the appren-

THE FAMILY AND THE HOME

tices are given a real feast with as much pork, chicken, 883
delicacies and wine as they can stuff away. 874 ●

The peasant boy begins to work as a herd before he is strong enough to do field work. Oxen, water buffalo, and 883
sheep are usually left in charge of small boys of eight or nine 462
years, who spend the day with their charges on the slopes of the mountain, or by the shore of the lake among the willow groves, playing the flute, or astride the broad back of the good-tempered water buffalo, wallowing in the shallows of the lake. The animals are allowed to graze on the narrow dykes between the rice fields, but under the watchful eyes of their young herdsman the well-trained beasts never dare to wander into the tempting unfenced crops on either side. The complete control which a small boy exercises over a huge water buffalo in these circumstances, though it does not seem strange to the Min Chia, astonishes visitors who know the ways of domestic animals in other lands. The lazy, sunny days on the back of a water buffalo must seem in retrospect a golden age to the young Min Chia when he has grown old enough to do the hard unceasing work on the land, wading through thick mud when ploughing, or hoeing the roots out of the heavy black soil of the drained fields.

The peasant girl begins to work at the same age, or earlier than her brother. Apart from helping the older women at the domestic tasks, the young girls carry loads of produce to the market, and at an early age, thirteen or fourteen, they are left in charge to sell this and bring the proceeds home at night. This free and independent life spent all day in the busy scenes of a town street, or a village market place away from the supervision of parents gives the Min Chia girl a self confidence and assurance rarely found in the women of eastern countries, and is at once a proof of, and a tribute to, the good sense of the Min Chia mothers and the good